

# News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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## MARKEY CALLS SECURITY OF SPENT NUCLEAR FUEL VULNERABLE

### NRC Lowered Security for Spent Nuclear Fuel Storage Facilities and Decommissioned Nuclear Reactors

WASHINGTON, D.C. --

Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA) today released a letter to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) regarding the security of spent nuclear fuel and decommissioned reactors against a terrorist attack. While recent studies have concluded that an aircraft attack on spent nuclear fuel could have the same impact as a ten kiloton nuclear bomb, the NRC has chosen to lower security at decommissioned reactors, even though the spent fuel remains stored there for years. Moreover, recent NRC studies of safeguards of spent nuclear fuel don't even consider a terrorist attack in their analysis.

Markey said, "The NRC is still operating in a pre-September 11 world. While the NRC and the nuclear power industry has been saying nothing short of 'It can't happen here,' we know all too well that the terrorists of Al Qaeda have contemplated and would carry out an attack on a nuclear facility."

The letter calls on the NRC to:

- Redo its earlier analysis that failed to consider the consequences of a fire fed by more than 20,000 gallons of jet fuel (the amount typically held in a Boeing 757 or 767) at a spent nuclear fuel facility. NRC's earlier analysis only considered fires that lasted about 15 minutes and assumed that there was no reason to consider long duration fires because of the "very low probability that firefighting personnel would be unable to respond within 24 hours." However, while firefighters were able to respond within 24 hours to the World Trade Center attack and the Chernobyl accident, the fire at the World Trade Center took more than 24 hours to extinguish and the graphite core fire at Chernobyl took more than 9 days to put out.
- Consider the threat of a terrorist attack on a spent nuclear fuel facility and revise its regulations accordingly. While NRC's analysis of an accidental zirconium fire at such a facility concluded that it could have "significant offsite radiological consequences," the analysis explicitly ignored the possibility that such a fire could be started by a terrorist. The NRC inexplicably chose to reduce certain insurance, emergency preparedness and safeguards requirements at these facilities.
- Explain discrepancies between the NRC's October 16, 2001 letter to the Congressman and its own earlier reports on the consequences of a breach of a cask containing spent nuclear fuel.

"These facilities are extremely vulnerable," said Rep. Markey, "and yet the consequences of a terrorist attack that successfully breaches the spent nuclear fuel storage casks could release enough radioactive

material to make entire communities uninhabitable for years, and cause significant injury and radiation-related cancers. The NRC must take steps to secure these facilities."

More information at [www.house.gov/markey](http://www.house.gov/markey) under the Anti-Terrorism sub-heading.

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